



Millet Myths

By Lisa Grimes



What are the myths about millet? In researching this topic, I found a wide variety in views and opinions about millet. At first my research was to discover a definite decision pro or con about feeding millet. I wanted to find the actual nutritional statistics and its nutritional place in a cockatiel's diet. Then I decided that the verdict about myth or fact needs to be up to the individual breeder/owner.

As a novice breeder I have heard these statements about millet.

1. Feed lots of millet it is high in fat and will put weight on your birds. This is especially good when traveling to shows as they will not lose as much weight when you travel.
2. Millet has no nutritional value for your birds. It is junk food for them.
3. Spray millet for babies is the best way to wean them.
4. Millet is the best source of protein.

In looking up the actual nutritional statistics as found on packaging of millet, here is what I found. Millet is actually low in fat and contains about 60% carbohydrates, 12% protein and 4% minerals as well as essential amino acids. I then went to the internet, the findings varied some, but the basic percentages were within a percent of each other.

After searching the internet for information, the next step was to talk with Advanced Exhibitor/breeders who have been doing this for years. Their birds are healthy and fabulous to look at. Again, there is wide variety of opinion on this. Don Mertes a cockatiel breeder, from Arizona stated that "millet is a complete protein, meaning that it also contains essential amino acids to utilize its' protein." That goes with what nutritional information I found.

Don feeds a healthy amount of millet, not just in spray form, but in the mix of seed he feeds. He also soaks the millet to make the amino acids more active and available to the birds. Research again supports this idea.

Other breeders feel it is a nice snack for their birds, but not a staple for them. Some feel it is a maintenance food. Some say it has no nutritional value at all. Most veterinarians feel millet is junk food for birds. They also generally promote a pellet versus seed diet.

Weaning babies may be easier with millet, but to say it is the best way, I do not agree. I think that when weaning, variety needs to be offered from the very beginning, to ensure balance of nutrition. The other factor to consider is that babies will play with millet out of curiosity. So I also feel it aids in introduction of solid foods.

From a behavioral standpoint, cockatiels will go to millet when stressed, scared or injured. At times their foraging instinct kicks in to sustain them in times of stress or weakness. I personally

have kept a bird alive on millet when they would not touch anything else. The question to ask here is why? According to Leslie Huegerich a long time owner and breeder of cockatiels feels this is because, the high percentage of carbohydrates in millet, breaks down into simple sugars over time and sustain a sick birds energy level so they can begin eating more complex foods. This helps to sustain them until they are able to return to a more nutritional balance. The high digestibility of millet makes it an excellent choice for birds in weakened condition.

It is my opinion that millet has a place in the diet of a cockatiel. To say there is no nutritional value, I do not agree. It is an easily digestible source of protein and carbohydrates. I do feel it is an important addition in a balance diet that includes seeds, pellets, leafy greens, whole grain breads and cereals, and yes MILLET!

For information on sprouting millet or soaking millet look at the following websites: (please check for safe sprouting tips)

www.holisticbird.org

www.sproutpeople.com